

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L ZAGREB 001660

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE (NARDI)
USNATO FOR DEHART AND MOELLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/23/2013
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EU](#) [HR](#) [NATO](#) [NATO](#)
SUBJECT: POLITICS, POLITICS: AMBASSADOR'S INITIAL CALL ON
PARLIAMENT SPEAKER TOMCIC

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph Frank for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

Summary

[11.](#) (C) The opposition-leading HDZ party will remain strong after parliamentary elections this November, but it will not be able to form a government; Croatia's next coalition government will be largely similar to the current lineup of parties, Parliament Speaker Zlatko Tomcic confidently predicted during his first meeting with the Ambassador. Tomcic declared that, right up until the beginning of the formal campaign period, the ruling coalition will remain focused on driving forward with Croatia's top policy priorities: integration into the EU and NATO. The Ambassador applauded the coalition's consensus on key goals and reaffirmed U.S. support for Croatia's eventual accession into Euro-Atlantic institutions. There is strong agreement within the international community that Croatia must continue to make progress on reform; concrete achievements in key areas will help Croatia's progress toward both NATO and the EU.
End Summary.

Tomcic: Looking Forward to Close Relationship

[12.](#) (C) On July 22, the Ambassador paid his initial call on Parliament (Sabor) Speaker Zlatko Tomcic. Tomcic was eager to establish a close working relationship with the Ambassador similar to the one he enjoyed with former Ambassador Rossin. Despite the formal elegance of the Sabor's reception rooms, Tomcic was open and informal about political challenges facing the coalition and his Croatian Peasants' Party (HSS). He apologized for not being able to meet with the Ambassador in the first days following his arrival in Croatia, explaining that official visits by two heads of state (Israel and Turkey) and the press of business now before the parliament relating to EU accession made scheduling difficult.

Tomcic: We're Focused on EU/NATO Accession

[13.](#) (C) Tomcic declared that both the Government and the Parliament's majority are in full agreement on Croatia's top policy priorities: integration into the EU and NATO. Parliament passed legislation on defense reform and a law to restructure Croatia's intelligence services to support the Government's bid for NATO membership. The process of bringing Croatia's legislation into line with EU standards is an intense, ongoing process, but the parliament's unanimous declaration in September 2002 supporting Croatia's membership application demonstrated Croatia's commitment, said Tomcic. He complained bitterly about the opposition's "destructive, selfish" actions in the last two months to boycott voting in the Sabor for political reasons. Tomcic said that he is certain that the EU and NATO will judge Croatia's suitability for membership not only by formal criteria, but also by the behavior of the political opposition. Fortunately, Tomcic pointed out, the government enjoys an extraordinary level of public support for its accession goals.

[14.](#) (C) Tomcic said that much of the work the parliament is doing to help Croatia progress towards the EU and NATO goes on behind the scenes, particularly its work to reach out to other parliaments in the region. Croatia knows it cannot progress in a vacuum: a stable and prosperous Croatia can only exist in a stable and prosperous region. Tomcic said that, since Croatia may be several steps ahead of some states in the region, it can serve as an example of how to move forward.

Ambassador: Croatia Has Lots Of Work To Do

[15.](#) (C) The Ambassador welcomed Tomcic's commitment to EU and NATO membership and said that the U.S. remains committed to helping Croatia achieve these goals. He hailed the broad support for these goals among Croatia's political leaders, but explained that there is also broad consensus within the international community that Croatia has important reform

work still to achieve. The international community agrees that for EU and NATO accession, Croatia must make concrete progress on key issues, including refugee return, judicial reform, ICTY cooperation and regional relations. U.S. assistance programs are directed toward helping Croatia achieve these goals. Tomcic expressed appreciation for the Ambassador's support and also for the significant commitment of U.S. assistance to Croatia since the change in government in January 2000.

Privatization: HSS Pressing For Changes to Law

16. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question about the politically sensitive issue of privatization, Tomcic claimed that the disparity between his party's view and that of PM Racan's SDP has been exaggerated by Croatia's irresponsible media. Under the Tudjman regime, the privatization process was an opportunity for "their people" to get rich by taking public property. While the current government has done much better, Tomcic expressed regret that it has not made as much progress as the public had hoped. Not a single large-scale privatization has taken place without "incident," Tomcic complained. Tomcic said that the SDP and the HSS have now agreed on a way forward (according to an HSS model), and that a new law on privatization would be presented to parliament in September. Tomcic brought up the recent privatization of 25 percent of INA, Croatia's state-owned energy company, and declared that he is convinced that this process was "very correct," and that there would be no "dirty laundry" discovered, despite what might be alleged in the press.

Sabor to Work Overtime to Keep Election Campaign Short

17. (C) The Ambassador steered the conversation toward electoral politics, and asked how the parliament's work would be affected by the campaign. Tomcic said that an election date in late November had been agreed to with key coalition partners, but that would not stop him from keeping the parliament at work. He told the Ambassador that he had already announced an extraordinary session from September 9 - 15, which means that the Sabor will be in session continuously until the middle of October, focused almost entirely on the EU accession agenda. Tomcic expressed hope that the official campaign period will be kept as short as possible in order to keep conflicts between parties to a minimum and also to keep the costs of campaigning -- which are by law covered primarily by the state budget -- as low as possible.

Election Prediction: Return of Our Coalition

18. (C) Tomcic predicted that the opposition HDZ would be the leading vote-getter in the next election, but was confident that it would not be able to attract enough support from other parties to form a government. The SDP would fare well, but would get "slightly fewer" seats in the next parliament. He expected his own HSS to do slightly better than the 16 seats (about ten percent of the total) it holds in the current Sabor, but the Croatian People's Party (HNS) would also see a sharp improvement.

19. (C) Tomcic said that, since the SDP, HSS and HNS will probably not have quite enough seats to form an absolute majority, the coalition will have to rely on those MPs which will fall outside of the two "blocs." Tomcic said he expects that the next Sabor will have as many as 15 MPs from smaller or regional parties, fully eight MPs representing ethnic minorities and perhaps four who represent Croatians abroad. The most complex part of forming the next government will be the process of bringing smaller parties into the coalition. Nevertheless, Tomcic is confident that there will be "no great changes" between the next coalition government and the current lineup of parties. (Note: Uncertainty about which parties would form the next government has usually centered on the possibility that Tomcic's HSS would break with the current coalition and go with the HDZ -- a prospect which looks increasingly implausible with each passing week. End Note.)

Next Government Must Have Stronger Coalition Agreement

10. (C) Tomcic said he believes Croatia's democracy has developed far enough to "allow the luxury" of waiting to form coalitions until after elections. The HSS will then advocate hammering out a strong national-level policy program in order to create conditions where disagreements over policy no longer disrupt the work of the government. Such a program would mean that ICTY cooperation would not be an issue for debate, but an obligation of the government. The same should hold true for issues relating to return of refugees and for

working to improve relations with Serbia and Montenegro.

11. (C) The Ambassador praised Tomcic's leadership in the parliament and expressed his eagerness to continue a regular, private dialogue. Tomcic readily accepted and proposed that the two meet again, more informally, toward the end of August, before the Sabor next convenes.

Comment

12. (C) Tomcic was on-message and worked hard to make a good impression; he clearly recognizes how important good relations with the U.S. are to achieving Croatia's goals. A cagey, cautious politician, for Tomcic to predict a successful outcome of the next election with such confidence so far in advance is significant, even if his forecast largely represents the current conventional wisdom.

FRANK

NNNN